“I'm a bottom, what did you expect” or a mixed methods study of r/rolereversal

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Abstract

Exactly 86 days ago, during my class on the sociology of gender, I originally decided to study the inhabitants of one of my favorite (and most lurked) Reddit communities r/rolereversal. After doing 4 surveys which totaled 121 unique responses, I got to work towards analyzing the data, themes, and implications of gender role reversal as a social force in the construction of relationships and its implications for society.

1: The Numbers and definitions

Firstly, it is important to understand that gender roles, their implications, effects, and nuances vary from culture to culture and look very different in various societies. In early childhood care, cultural competency is very important and assists in healthily building a foundation towards socialization, which includes the realm of gender[1]. This is important to establish because gender is still a social force that follows everyone throughout daily life and leads to stratification in societies in various ways that are both very visible and in ways that are naked to the human eye. So what happens when groups of people congregate and decide to explore reversing conventionally held gender relationship dynamics? This is where r/rolereversal comes in, as a community according to one moderator of the subreddit u/SunkenStone describes its origin in the following paragraph (edited for length and clarity) “The RR community did not start on Reddit, and was originally a twin concept with r/gentlefemdom. GFD handled the sexual aspects of the dynamic, while RR was about the romantic component. [...] For GFD, that meant trying to define the boundaries of "gentle". For RR, that meant defining exactly which ‘roles’ were being

[1] Masterson M (2023) Taking steps toward cultural competence through meaningful conversations. *Taking Steps Toward Cultural Competence Through Meaningful Conversations | McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership*. Available from: https://mccormickcenter.nl.edu/library/cultural-competence-conversations-121223/ (accessed 4 January 2025).

reversed." (SunkenStone, 2023[2]). This context helps us define the operant definition of gender role reversal which the subreddit itself defines as in their FAQ page with the following: "Relationship Role Reversal, is a relationship dynamic wherein the traditional male and female relationship roles or tendencies are reversed." (FAQ, 2025[3]). This definition helps us better understand the sociocultural attitudes that underpin the people who make up the data presented, with this in mind I made 4 surveys, each survey will be documented separately below.

Survey 1: The Beginnings and (Financial) Hurdles

In the beginning, I expected at maximum to get no less than 10 responses to my original survey which was started on October 10th of 2024. However, after less than 24 hours the survey had filled up, I was genuinely shocked at the volume of responses but, ran into a wall with only being able to view the original 25 responses and all other features (such as the ability to download, analyze, and present data) being paywalled by SurveyMonkey. In a moment of frustration, I decided to use my allowance for the month to get access to all of my data, originally I had aimed for the student plan which would be much more affordable to me however as I soon learned SurveyMonkey did not see my Community College ID nor the College that I attend as sufficient evidence (this alongside me providing my student ID number) so I dug in my heels and begrudgingly gave 100 dollars to a faceless corporation and decided that I would milk every single penny of what this venture was worth throughout the process. I had given the following set of questions identical on each survey:

1. Gender: How do you identify?
2. Do you consider yourself to be transgender or cisgender?
3. Are you in a relationship? If so, do you practice gender role reversal in your day-to-day life?
4. What draws you towards gender role reversal?
5. What is a character or piece of media that encapsulates your idea of gender role reversal?

The first survey's results came to this: 79.31% of the first batch were men (23 respondents) while only 20.69% of the first batch were women (6 respondents). However, one outlier respondent described themselves with what I can assume is an unfinished answer, stating: "I believe I'm a man but see so many problems with traditi". Afterward, the results further broke down to whether the participants view themselves as transgender or cisgender, this question was added for two reasons. On one hand, I am transgender and there's oftentimes a lack of research made by and centering transgender individuals[4], there's a need to combat cisnormativity within

[2] https://archive.ph/ILDP5
[3] https://archive.ph/mDYoB
[4] Hatch, H.A., Warner, R.H., Broussard, K.A. *et al.* Predictors of Transgender Prejudice: A Meta-Analysis. *Sex Roles* **87**, 583–602 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-022-01338-6

research and general society with narratives that employ transphobia[5], harming gender non-conforming individuals, even if they're cisgender[6]. This is something that concerns me as a researcher because there is a possibility that many of those who participate in role-reversal relationships publicly could be subject to hate crimes, violence, or many other kinds of bigotry and discrimination. The results came in with 7.14% being transgender (2 respondents) and 92.86 being cisgender (26 respondents). Question 3 was by far one of the most interesting in that of the 29 participants 55.17% (16 respondents) aren't in relationships but, practice role reversal in their daily life, 37.93% (11 respondents) are in relationships but, don't practice role reversal in their daily life, and only 6.90% (2 respondents) are both in a relationship and practice role reversal in their daily life. For the last 2 questions, I had asked as to what draws participants towards gender role reversal and what media encapsulates their ideas of the concept. Generally, this fell into 2 general themes:

1. A desire to escape social alienation from gender and increased want of intimacy
2. Breakaways from traditionally held modes of gender socialization

This then led to me being astonished by the amount of respondents who cited various media ranging from video games, comic books, anime, and manga which displayed varying degrees of role reversal.

Survey 2: Fuck it, we ball

Next, something that I didn't expect had happened under the original Reddit post I had made. After looking at the numbers of the original survey, the lack of women's participation was very underwhelming, so I decided to make multiple batches of the same survey to get as much of a response as possible. The numbers broke down as the following:

- 79.19% identify as Men (21 respondents) this includes 2 outlier respondents who defined themselves as either "AMAB" (shorthand for Assigned Male At Birth) or Born Male with a lack of a distinct description of gender identity.
- 8.33% identify as Women (2 respondents)
- 4.17% identify as Non-Binary (1 respondent)
- One outlier response simply said "little kitty", whoever you are *same! Keep going, you silly little kitty!*

The Transgender-Cisgender identification broke down as having 95.65% identify as cisgender (22 respondents) while 4.35% identified as transgender (1 respondent).

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[5] Roy, E., Hehman, E., & Axt, J. (2023). Local Legislation is Associated With Regional Transgender Attitudes. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231218340

[6] Walters, M. A. Legalizing transphobia: from courtroom to legislature, how gender-critical activism is hurting us all. *Journal of Law and Society*. 2024; 51: 343–366. https://doi.org/10.1111/jols.12491

The relationship-practice section also had very interesting results the second time around with the following numbers:

- 45.83% were neither in a relationship nor practiced role reversal (11 respondents)
- 29.17% weren't in a relationship but, practice gender role reversal (7 respondents)
- 20.83% of respondents were both in a relationship and practiced gender role reversal in daily life (5 respondents)
- 4.17% we're in a relationship and do not practice role reversal in daily life (1 respondent)

For question 4 I want to highlight 4 responses that exemplify the common themes displayed throughout the survey and will be further examined in the *theory* section of this paper

Some highlighted and enlightening responses

Respondent #5: "I can easier imagine myself as the role of a caretaker than a provider. I am thinking of taking a history degree which probably will make me a decent wage at most. I also find myself doing many household tasks and been doing so since middle school, i like clean households to say the least. I also enjoy wearing feminine clothing. As for my partner, it probably stems from my mom being the provider in my household, i also like feeling protected by women, and i also like girls in masc clothes doing masculine activities[.]

Respondent #9: "Being a little kitty [.]"

Respondent #10: "I'll try to shorten my thesis on this matter…for far too long women have been forced to live in a society designed for men, and men who do not fit the mold of gender conformity have also been forced to live in this society. Role reversal, in whatever ways whatever roles are flipped, allows for both groups of people to live happily and not in misery trying and failing to live in societies long established norms.

Respondent #11: "Well, it is just how I am naturally. Like it is an inherent part of me. It is my sexual/romantic orientation. Also, I think, as is the case with lots of people and relationships (not just RR), we are drawn sometimes to what we lack in ourselves. I have never been particularly brave, strong or confident and so I think I am drawn to people who do have those qualities as a way to compensate for what I am lacking. For instance, I want to be protected because I am not confident in protecting myself."

Question 5 again saw some characters that were repeated just as was done with the original 1st survey which is worth highlighting, these are:

- Shikkimori Isn't Just A Cutie (Anime + Manga)
- Luigi x Daisy (primarily fan art and various portrayals through specific Mario games[7])
- 2B and 9S from NieR: Automata
- Samus Aran the main character of the Metroid series

[7] https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Characters/SuperMarioBrosThePrincesses

Survey 3: I Regret Nothing

By this point, I had found myself inundated with data and numbers but, something deep within my brain told me to **keep going,** and just like that I found myself amid a 3rd survey, I had one task in mind at this point: Getting over 100 unique responses…with this goal in mind I pushed forward with the following results:

Gender Identification: 67.57% identified as men (25 respondents), 16.22% identified as women (6 responses), another 16.22% identified as non-binary (6 respondents), and finally 2 decided to self-describe with the unique labels of “Gentle Giant” and “Softboy”. On the cisgender-transgender divide 89.19% identified as cisgender (33 respondents) and 10.81% identified as transgender (4 respondents). Just as in the previous survey, many of the same themes present were shown.

Here are 3 responses from Question 4 which will also be extrapolated upon later:

> Respondent #11: ”Right from my childhood, I am been attracted to bigger/ stronger women who has inherent nurturing qualities- It also involves being comfortable letting others lead, learning how to nurture and care for those around us, and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable[.]”
>
> Respondent #14: “It feels good to provide for my partner by putting my arm around him, carrying his bag, etc.”
>
> Respondent #15: “Touch starved, desire to be held and comforted[.]”

Again much like was displayed in the previous survey, there is a multitude of media that respondents showed interest in these include:

- JoCat (A Twitch Streamer)
- Millie and Moxie from Helluva Boss
- ASMR role-plays

Survey 4: The Final Survey

This was my final survey, at this point, I had seen the numbers and concluded that I wouldn’t be able to deal with their numbers so to reflect this mental breakdown I will only be listing the numbers:

Gender Identification: 53.33% identified as men (16 respondents), 26.67% identified as women (8 respondents), 10% identified as non-binary (3 respondents), 10% chose to self-describe their gender (3 respondents). Again on the Cisgender and Transgender question 83.33% identified as cisgender (25 respondents) and 16.67% identified as transgender (5 respondents).

On the relationship question 46.67% weren't in a relationship nor did they practice role reversal in daily life (14 respondents), 36.67% weren't in a relationship but, practice role reversal in their daily life (11 respondents), 10.00% were in relationships and do practice role reversal in daily life (3 respondents), and 6.67% were in a relationship but, do not practice role reversal in their daily life (2 respondents). Again as all 3 previous surveys showed there are a multitude of reasons that people enjoy or are drawn to role reversal.

Here are 5 examples from the 4th survey

Respondent #4: "I am a heterosexual male that is best described as "romantically submissive", I cannot help but be attracted to women that are confident/strong/capable/scare me a little bit. Weirdly[,] this is completely disconnected from the rest of my character/personality, I'm known for being very dominant and conventionally masculine among those who know me."

Respondent #7: "I have always [been] attracted towards stronger and bigger women, who has nurturing inherent qualities- It also involves me being comfortable letting others lead, learning how to nurture and care for those around us, and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable[.]"

Respondent #19: "I like supporting my fiance's passions and he likes supporting my business ambitions. I grew up with the idea of not 100% depending on a man financially being drilled into me, so I think somewhere along the way the idea of being the provider for a man who truly appreciates and supports my efforts started to grow on me. I'd say we're about 70% RR overall."

Respondent #20: "It just feels right. I never got into romantic media, because I could never insert myself as the girl characters. I'd always want to do what the boy characters did, in any media. Role-reversal makes me feel seen, because it takes gender-coded tropes I saw growing up and flip it on their heads. It makes me feel seen!!"

Respondent #24: "I'm drawn to gender role reversal because it resonates with my personal experiences and challenges , and has helped me see that the expectations society has for me does not dictate how i will live my life. It allows me to explore my identity more freely and inspires me to embrace a more authentic version of myself."

Again, just as all previous survey questions 5 showed various recurring and diverse media that encapsulate gender role reversal, these include:

- Way of the House Husband (Manga + Anime)
- /adhg/ otherwise known as Anthro's Dominating Humans General (according to this respondent this is an extension of 4chan's /trash/ board)
- Witch Craft Works (Anime + Manga)
- A short animation by the comic Cyanide and Happiness called "Girl Fight"

2: Relevant Literature (and finding it)

When it came to finding literature and anything that had to do with the subject of "gender role reversal" and the overall reversal of traditional male/female gender roles, it was quite a difficult task. For instance, one of the relatively few articles I was able to find was from the *British Journal of Sociology back in 1989.* In the paper, Pilcher interviewed 3 generational cohorts of women within the United Kingdom[8]. In this study, role reversal was seen more favorably by younger cohorts of women, while the oldest cohorts gave the most hostile accounts regarding gender roles being reversed. On top of this, all or most of the other studies regarding gender role reversal were concerned with married couples who had children and reversed roles under different economic circumstances (e.g, Clague's article for *Social Currents*[9] regarding the pandemic effects of educated mothers being the breadwinners). One of the few articles related to the phenomenon of this paper came from the *Social Semiotics*[10] which discussed how Chinese social media users engage in gender role reversal and the consumption of media amongst women and its commodification under neoliberal capitalism. The saving grace that the aforementioned article gave to me in this case is that there is a structured analysis regarding how women and men are portrayed and how this evolution has continued from Maoist China towards the modern day, with increasing social stratification. In this article, TikTok's CEO was highlighted by many of Xiaohongshu's female user base as a prime example of what women consider to be modern masculinity with Shouzi Chew exuding a roaring sense of charisma and strength during the politically tense 2023 meeting regarding manufactured outrage regarding TikTok's national security to the United States of America[11]. There seems to be, to some extent, a similar tension regarding the Chinese government of the rise of perceived effeminacy amongst men[12] with near-similar rhetoric being espoused by the current Trump administration and has largely been a silently accepted dominant force within American society at large[13].

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[8] Pilcher, J. (1998). Gender Matters? Three Cohorts of Women Talking about Role Reversal. Sociological Research Online, 3(1), 5-16. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.132 (Original work published 1998)

https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Characters/SuperMarioBrosThePrincesses

[9] Clague, A. K. (2025). Neo-Egalitarianism: The Domestic Strategies of Breadwinner Mothers During COVID-19. *Social Currents*, *12*(2), 178-194. https://doi.org/10.1177/23294965251324649(Original work published 2025)

[10] Ge, J., Zheng, X., & Tian, W. (2025). Erotic capital in digital age: a multimodal analysis of the idolization of fresh meat elite on Xiaohongshu. *Social Semiotics*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2025.2473996

[11] Hantschel, A. (2023) *Manufactured outrage is big business - dame magazine*, *Dame Magazine -*. Available at: https://www.damemagazine.com/2023/07/18/manufactured-outrage-is-big-business/ (Accessed: 07 June 2025).

[12] Song, G. (2021). "Little Fresh Meat": The Politics of Sissiness and Sissyphobia in Contemporary China. *Men and Masculinities*, *25*(1), 68-86. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X211014939 (Original work published 2022)

[13] Wernecke, C. J. (2024). Priming "American carnage:" reality television and Donald J. Trump. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *41*(4), 334–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2024.2392806

Because of this, gender role reversal seems to play a tenacious counter to what the Trump administration considered to be “Restoring Biological Truth To The Federal Government[14]” and society at large, even when archaeological evidence disproves this[15] alongside sociological evidence from past[16] and present[17] indigenous societies and cultures.

3: Conclusions

In closing, much of r/rolereversal and the connections the Redditors contained within tend to make connections to the concept based around a mix of symbolic interactionist communications and how these dynamics would and should play out, alongside the role and influence that media outside one’s immediate material environments tend to influence and assist in the kinds of gender play and relationship building that is produced from reversing gender roles and embracing alternative modes of socialization. Because of this, more research should go towards researching communities that engage in gender role reversal alongside their outside and internal social factors that come with this territory sociologically.

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[14] https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/defending-women-from-gender-ideology-extremism-and-restoring-biological-truth-to-the-federal-government/

[15] **The Myth of Man the Hunter: Women’s contribution to the hunt across ethnographic contexts** Anderson A, Chilczuk S, Nelson K, Ruther R, Wall-Scheffler C (2023) The Myth of Man the Hunter: Women’s contribution to the hunt across ethnographic contexts. PLOS ONE 18(6): e0287101. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287101

[16] Andreson, J. L. (2025). Historical Genealogies of Black Feminism in Brazil: Candomblé Priestesses and Embodied Territoriality. Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics, 9(1), 05. https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/16015

[17] Moses-O’Donnell, O., Wemigwans, N., & Pitawanakwat, P. (2025). Matriarchy in practice: Lessons from Anishinaabe Kweok in community programming. *Qualitative Social Work*, *24*(2-3), 157-162. https://doi.org/10.1177/14733250241312259 (Original work published 2025)